



The Polygon School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 116624
Local Authority Southampton
Inspection number 290568
Inspection date 7 February 2007
Reporting inspector James Bowden

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Handel Terrace
School category	Community special		Southampton
Age range of pupils	11–16		SO15 2FH
Gender of pupils	Boys	Telephone number	02380 636776
Number on roll (school)	51	Fax number	02380 336066
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair	Mrs C Trueick
		Headteacher	Mrs A Hendon-John
Date of previous school inspection	22 April 2002		

Age group 11–16	Inspection date 7 February 2007	Inspection number 290568
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by an Additional Inspector.

Description of the school

The Polygon school provides for learners with a statement of special educational need as a result of their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Many have other additional learning needs as well. It is the only school of its type in Southampton and admits learners referred by the local authority's Special Educational Needs (SEN) Panel. Learners from different year groups can be admitted at different times during the school year. Most join the school with a history of non-school attendance.

The great majority of learners are of White British origin. Approximately forty-two per cent are known to the Youth Offending Team and six per cent have experienced a custodial sentence during the past year. All but one learner currently on roll receives specialist support from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health team. The percentage of learners entitled to free school meals is high and is indicative of low socio-economic background. Currently, ten per cent of learners are looked after by two different local authorities.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

The Polygon is a good school. The pastoral care, guidance and support given to learners is particularly strong, and promoting their personal development and well-being is at the centre of the school's work. This is indicative of its strong caring and supportive ethos. Learners are warmly welcomed in the mornings for breakfast club in mixed age groups and are able to talk about any issues that may have arisen since the previous day. After 'wake and shake-up' time they are then ready to work. The school is effective in supporting each learner in very specific ways, meeting effectively their personal and learning needs. However, unauthorised absence for some is a problem, often as a result of mental health concerns or family problems. Nevertheless, the school does all it can to improve attendance and there are clear signs that this is slowly beginning to improve. For some individuals attendance improves considerably compared to what it was before attending Polygon.

The school works very well with outside agencies to support learners and has outstanding partnerships with others to promote learners' well-being. There is, for example, a 'safe site' group that meets twice yearly to ensure that the local community is involved in the running of the school. Parents are very supportive because of the help the school gives them and the difference it makes to their children. One parent wrote, 'My son was out of school for two years before he started here. The Polygon has given him a chance to succeed whereas a mainstream school could not. He settled in straight away due to their care and understanding. I only wish I knew about the school long before'.

Standards on entry to the school are generally well below what is expected for learners' ages. Many have had negative experiences of mainstream school and have missed much time because of social, emotional and behavioural needs and, in many instances, mental health concerns. Those who attend regularly make good progress towards the targets set for them and achieve well. All those who left in 2006 continued into further education, work or training.

The quality of teaching and learning is good. As a result, learners work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Teachers and special school assistants (SSAs) are sensitive to learners' needs and their patient and purposeful approach puts learners at ease. Work is planned effectively and a variety of activities in each lesson help keep learners on task. When learners' attitudes need to be challenged this is done calmly and effectively. Though learners use information and communication technology (ICT) to present their work, teachers' formal planning does not always include the use of ICT to support teaching and learning. A good quality curriculum contributes well to the overall progress made. This includes the National Curriculum as well as citizenship, personal, social and health education and a variety of clubs after school. Though pastoral care, guidance and support is particularly strong, the analysis and use of assessment data to track more closely learners' academic progress is less so.

Leadership is well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses as a result of well established monitoring and evaluation. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and

the areas identified for improvement are realistic and appropriate. The relatively new governing body is developing its work well as a critical and supportive friend of the school. In the light of the school's track record, improvements in areas identified at the previous inspection, the clear direction set by the leadership team and the 'fresh' focus provided by the new headteacher the school has good capacity to improve further.

What the school should do to improve further

- Analyse and use data more effectively in order to track individual learners' academic progress.
- Strengthen planning for the use of ICT to support teaching and learning in all subjects.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Those learners who attend regularly achieve well. Due to their social, emotional and behavioural needs as well as additional learning needs and mental health concerns, learners tend to arrive at the school with well below average attainment and poor learning skills. By the time they leave the school, learners achieve standards that are closer to national averages. This is because the school works hard to settle, improve their behaviour and rekindle their interest in learning. As a result, learners make up for lost time and make good progress. In 2006, one hundred per cent of those attending regularly achieved at least one GCSE A* - G grade pass and two learners one A* - C grade pass. All, bar one, exceeded their expected achievements. Those who took end of Key Stage 3 tests in 2006 improved by at least one level in relation to their attainment on entry, though progress in English was less marked. Learners, including those looked after by local authorities, make good progress towards the targets set for them on their individual and personal learning plans.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners' personal development is good, especially for those who attend regularly. The difficulties they arrive with diminish as their confidence and self-esteem improve. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Afternoon assemblies, for example, celebrate learners' achievements and allow them time to reflect on relevant issues. Although there are occasional outbursts, learners generally get on well together and with their teachers and other adults they work with. Some older learners mentor younger ones to help them settle in the school. The school is doing all it can to improve attendance, which is satisfactory overall. This aspect remains a clear priority for the school but some issues remain beyond its control. Some families, for example, cannot afford the daily public transport costs and there is a reluctance to take legal action to enforce attendance where older learners are involved. Regular attendees enjoy their education, say they feel safe and have an adult to talk to should they feel this

necessary. One commented, 'The school deals with bullying better than mainstream school'. Learners are developing healthy lifestyles as a result of healthy meals and snack packs provided by the school, formal physical education lessons and opportunities to play football at morning breaks, lunch times and at after school clubs. They take a very active part in contributing to the community. Their views are listened to and acted upon, there is an active school council, they are involved in charitable activities and some are on the interview panel for staff appointments. Older learners follow personalised learning programmes, including work experience or placement with another provider, which helps them prepare for their future economic well-being. The quality of their key skills of literacy, numeracy and use ICT contribute satisfactorily in this respect.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Positive working relationships between teachers, SSAs and learners underpin the quality of learning in lessons. Good class management and a calm approach set a positive tone in lessons and careful planning ensures the learning needs of all are met. Learning aims are made clear at the start of lessons thus learners are aware of what is expected of them. Rewards are used effectively to motivate learners and keep them on task. When their attitudes need to be challenged this is done calmly and effectively. Learners are encouraged to work both independently as well as collaboratively, for example, in practical physical education lessons. Work is generally marked well and comments indicate what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. However, assessment of their work is inconsistent because they are not being told what levels they are actually working at. Though learners use ICT to present their work, teachers' formal planning does not always include the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum provides a framework for learners to make good progress throughout the school. There is good breadth and balance and, in Years 10 and 11, links with further education colleges and other providers have enabled the introduction of vocational courses, which add further breadth and choice for learners. Citizenship, religious education and personal, social, health and education lessons help promote personal as well as spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The curriculum is enhanced further by opportunities for learners to participate in outdoor and adventurous activities off site and experience visiting workshops, such as the recent art workshop. Learners appreciate the opportunity to take part in a range of after school clubs, football being the most popular. Provision for ICT resources has improved but planning for the use of ICT to support teaching and learning in all subjects is underdeveloped.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Overall, the quality of care, guidance and support is good. The school recognises that learners will not cope effectively unless they feel calm and secure. Hence, there is a very strong emphasis placed on supporting their well-being. The high level of staff commitment, good relationships and good behaviour management and learners' own evaluation of their behaviour and the impact their actions can have on others all contribute to this. High quality links have been established with a range of outside specialist agencies to enhance further the quality of care, guidance and support. There are robust arrangements for safeguarding learners that comply with current requirements. Child protection and risk assessments are securely in place and staff are aware of their responsibilities.

The school is developing procedures for baseline testing of learners when they arrive in order to ensure its provision matches fully their learning needs. However, the school's analysis and use of data to track academic progress is not sharp enough. Learners benefit from good quality advice in helping them decide the next stage of their education and some are enabled to attend courses with other local providers during Years 10 and 11. As a result, some improve their motivation for learning. A parent of an ex-learner commented, 'He is full-time this year and the college is really pleased with his progress, he is on line to gain accreditation, and controls his anger well now'.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher and her leadership team have a clear focus on improving the quality of provision for learners and have set a positive tone and ethos for the school. All staff are highly committed to ensure every learner really matters and to improving social cohesion within the school. This ensures good progress is made by all. There are well-established procedures and routines for monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school. Teaching and learning are regularly monitored throughout the year. Self-evaluation is regular and accurate. Appropriate areas for improvement have been identified and effective development planning is helping the school to move forward. The budget is well managed and outcomes represent good value for money. Though there have been difficulties in recruiting governors in the past, the newly re-constituted governing body is developing its effectiveness as a critical and supportive friend of the school.

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Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The behaviour of learners	2
The attendance of learners	3
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

You may remember that I visited you for a day recently. I saw some of you working in lessons, in other activities and I had a chat with a group of you to seek your opinions on the education provided for you. I also had the opportunity to chat to individuals throughout the course of the day. Thank you all very much for being friendly and making me feel welcome. Those who attend regularly receive a good quality education, which you enjoy. On the whole, you behave well and value the support you are given. However, some of you need to attend more regularly to benefit from this. I have prepared a list of what is good about your education and another with a couple of things that could be better.

The things that are done well for you:

- the staff make sure you are safe and very well cared for
- they really have your best interests at heart and make every effort to make sure you will be able to do well in the future
- your personal development is good
- your views are listened to and staff make sure you are fully involved in running the school
- good quality teaching enables you all to make good progress
- the curriculum and other activities make your education interesting
- the headteacher and the staff have plans to make things even better for you.

These are a couple of areas where improvements are needed:

- the school needs to use the assessment information on you as individuals in a better way
- teachers need to have more planned opportunities for the use of ICT to help your learning.

Once again, many thanks for your welcome and I would like to wish you all the best for your future.

James Bowden

(Lead inspector)